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ABSTRACT

This teacher's handbook suggests that, as social, economic and political changes in the United States have altered family structure and parenting skills have become more complex and demanding, parent support programs and services must be made available. It is suggested that parenting should become a more cooperative process involving everyone in the community, particularly school personnel. Parent/teacher teaming, based on a common understanding of developmental objectives, is advocated as a tactic for achieving effective home-school relationships. Several ways of facilitating sustained home-school interaction, including parent-school cooperative child care, parent-child lending libraries, and parent advisory teams, are briefly described. Examples of school, community, university and agency sponsored parent education programs are presented and their implications for schools are assessed. Criteria for effective parenting and characteristics of development sensitive parents are suggested. Guides for effective parent and teacher communication are offered. (Author/RH)

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What Research Says to the Teacher

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Parenting

by Kevin J. Swick and R. Eleanor Duff

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PARENTS: THE CHILD'S FIRST TEACHER

Parents are the first people to interact continuously with the newborn infant. They have the opportunity to present the child with a positive example of how people live. Parental behavior, in effect, teaches the child about life and provides the child with a model of how things work. Thus, as the child's first teachers, parents have a major role in influencing her or his future behavior. Their non-verbal behaviors (for example, when and how they hold the infant) communicate to the child more clearly than words. Indeed, young children seem to place more credence in examples set by parents than in their words. (6)*

The cumulative set of parenting behaviors infants and young children experience represents a curriculum that influences them throughout life. When parents talk, sing songs, gently touch or feed the baby, they are conveying the message: you are important! In addition they are facilitating the infant's physical and social development. As parents respond to the needs of the infant they are giving the assurance of a secure and trusting environment. (6, 23, 37)

During infancy and the very early years parents have opportunities to help young children begin the development of their basic human capacities. Children, for example, learn to talk and develop language facility only when they have people to converse with, to think with, and to follow as models. By talking with and listening to children, parents set the stage for language acquisition at the same time that they establish a social and emotional bond with them. Various other behaviors such as providing the infant with proper nutrition, rest, security, and affection are a part of the parenting behaviors that teach children about the world in which they live. (13)

Just as parents are the child's first teachers, they also are learners who gain much wisdom from observing the behavior of their children. The kinds of expectations parents have for children will establish the way they treat them. Parents who expect too much of a child may initiate a process in which the child is precluded from reaching the expectancy level of other people. Likewise, when parents believe their children are of little value they are shaping those children for failure in life. (23)

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*Numbers in parentheses appearing in the text refer to the Selected References beginning on page 31.

Parents teach children to trust or distrust, love or hate, feel secure or insecure, to value or not value life itself. As children grow, parents continue to be facilitators and leaders. By setting limits for positive behavior, with reasonable expectations which allow for human errors, and by being consistent in home management, parents set an example. Through their interactions with children—praising, showing, involving, and rewarding—and in responding to children's inquiries, parents can lead them toward an understanding of the nature of learning. (15)

Further, when parents take children on walks or to parks and encourage their curiosity, they enhance the natural proclivity of children to learn. Spending quiet times together, visiting friends, and making things as part of natural family activities are all very positive parenting behaviors that combine to expand the learning capacities parents and teachers value.

Parents and children who know and value each other have obviously learned from each other. Both, in turn, come to know and value teachers as capable and compassionate people who also value them for who they are and what they can do, and not for who they might be or for what they are unable to do. To have a child is a wonderful event. To reach and teach a child is a process that requires growth, energy, and an ideal vision of tomorrow. As parents are the child's very first teachers, they certainly hold the power in their hands to provide children with a humane vision of what life can be! (39)

THE CHANGING NATURE OF PARENTING

One of the most significant roles parents perform is that of a model for the child to relate to and observe. Yet parents of today are functioning in many different ways and within many different contexts. The changing nature of parenting, influenced by social, economic, and political factors, results in a number of different models for children to follow.

In contrast to the once predominant two-parent family, it is now quite common to find single parent families, parent surrogate families, families where both parents work, as well as single people who adopt children. Many children live in more than one family setting during their lives. Parents also are being affected by changes in styles of family living. More today than ever before in history, they are likely to experience living with more than one marriage partner. And, in contrast to parents of twenty

years ago, today's parents are likely to spend more time on the job or in recreational pursuits than with their children. (42)

Not only has family structure changed, but the needed skills and processes for being effective parents have also become more complex and demanding. For example, with increased knowledge of how children develop and learn, today's parents are expected (and rightfully so) to play a more direct role in facilitating the growth and development of the child. Parents are also expected to be directly involved in the support of children through young adulthood. These are dramatic changes from the times when the young adolescent went to work in the fields or the factory at 12 or 14 years of age. (42)

Parents today more than in the past must be guidance counselors, nutritionists, facilitators, planners, budget makers, and family managers. They must perform varied tasks in their job roles and in the community. The complexity of parenting is such that many unprepared adults have opted out of the parent role, and others have elected to shift the responsibility to teachers, baby sitters, and child-care workers. This does not mean they dislike parenting; it is, rather, a signal that many parents are victims of an ill-founded concept of parenting. (39)

The implications of these changes for children, teachers, citizens, and parents are several. First, parenting needs to become a more cooperative process involving everyone in the community. Second, parents must receive more preparation for their parenting roles. Third, they need support and assistance in maintaining a productive home environment. Fourth, there is an urgent need for a closer working relationship between home and school. (40)

The parenting process, as it continues to change, must be conducted in a more orderly fashion. Planning for parenting roles can be started in school programs in which parents, young children, and adolescents are given various experiences in which they can *see* and *do* things related to positive parenting. Likewise, community groups can also be a part of the effort to promote positive parenting. Community-sponsored programs related to family assistance, parent education, prevention of child abuse, child-care programs, and parent recognition days are just a few ways every community can encourage effective parenting. (19, 22)

Unlike the slow-paced life of parents in a rural society, today's atmosphere confronts adults with situations requiring immediate decisions. Children are in need of more attention, and the demands of life are more

complex and intricate than ever before in history. These changes do not necessarily mean that parents will automatically become ineffective. Of course, pressure-packed living styles provide more opportunities for parents—and teachers—to see and feel success as individuals, in both personal and parenting roles.

Schools and communities will only be as effective as the parents who nurture and guide young children. As the nature of parenting continues to change, so schools and communities must change to accommodate and facilitate the development of parent skills in productive ways.

THE HOME AND SCHOOL: A TEAM

The home and the school have much in common, and parents and teachers have (or should have) a common interest in the *total development of the child*. Parents and teachers both confront the enormous task of helping and responding to the needs of children within a very complex social setting. How do I help the child? What can I do to reach him? Am I supporting and guiding her correctly? What kinds of experiences will benefit the child? These are questions parents and teachers ask and seek answers to in their daily interactions with children.

Although the home and school by their very existence represent a natural team, in too many communities they function in an isolated manner. There are reasons why this isolationist stance exists in both home and school. For too long the home has been considered a place of retreat from the larger social milieu, while schools have been viewed as places that provide an academic education. Both of these concepts are partially correct, yet learning takes place beyond the school doors and families need interactive-supportive relationships with community agencies if their social function is to have any possibility of existing. (22, 23, 28)

Another reason why homes and schools have been isolationist is that the leaders (parents and teachers) have received little training in communication techniques and teaming procedures. Classroom teachers who have spent years in a self-contained classroom know first-hand the kind of training and growth experiences needed to make the transition to a team-teaching situation. Parents and teachers need team planning and human relations skills to be effective in their educative roles. (24, 44)

The separation of home and school has existed largely because of a cultural-convenience attitude on the part of everyone in the society. The comfort of doing as one desires without the interference of other human beings can be deceiving. Such an outlook can eventually lead to a very parochial attitude which can inhibit growth. Families and schools become negative forces in the lives of children when they exist in isolation from each other.

Parents and teachers can become a team when they relate to each other in terms of the human-development processes in which they are involved. Parents and teachers need to be in touch with each other continuously so they can provide their children and themselves with a meaningful basis for developing and learning. (17, 40)

Parent-teacher teaming, if it is to be effective, must begin in the early stages of family life. Young parents are usually open to suggestions on things they can do to help children. Teachers too are interested in improving the lives of infants and toddlers so that they can insure more meaningful learning when these children reach school age. (45)

Teachers and other school personnel can initiate the teaming process by sponsoring parent-information programs and services in the school, and meeting with parents at home to give them materials and ideas they can put to use in the home-learning environment. On a broader scale, schools can work with local health and social service groups in designing and implementing programs related to family health care and social needs. School districts can also work with parents to develop high quality child-care centers in the schools or in other locations in the community. As the numbers of families in which both parents work continues to increase, parent-teacher sponsored child care centers can become one mode of building effective home-school relationships early in the life of the child. (24, 27, 40)

Parents also have a responsibility in the home-school relationship. They need to assist the school in establishing workable plans for home-school cooperation. Parents can do this by attending school programs related to their needs, attending conferences, and parent education workshops, and cooperating in the planning of home visits. In addition, parents can plan an important role in initiating and assisting in the development of effective programs for infants and toddlers. They can help the school, their child, and themselves by relating to the school as early as possible in the child's life.

Sometimes parents and teachers who may be interested in developing a home-school oriented program lack an understanding of how it works or why it is needed. In such cases school personnel may need to organize training sessions in which parents and teachers can acquire an idea of why a partnership is needed, how they can organize it effectively and what modes of communication are needed to make it effective. (40)

There are various ways parents and teachers can learn together about teaming, communicating, planning, and programming for effective home-school relationships. Parent-teacher teams, for example, can visit effective programs in other communities. Or, they may want to develop a library of materials related to topics and activities they have planned. In addition, parents and teachers can organize work sessions in which to discuss common concerns. During such sessions they can identify and discuss methods of handling problems, as well as begin to set up channels for communication among themselves. (40)

Teaming is a process in which individuals work together and share the tasks needed to accomplish their objectives. This is especially critical to the functioning of parent-teacher teams. As parents and teachers begin to work together, they need to share in the planning and implementation tasks vital to the success of *their* program. Team planning sessions, in which parents and teachers meet individually or in groups are invaluable for establishing a home-school program that works. Program objectives that reflect parental needs and cooperative parent-teacher projects will be more successful for everyone than a project which is carried out by a few people who have good intentions but lack the vision that commonly is gained from shared experiences. (7)

As parents and teachers work together they will find the following ideas useful in enhancing their relationship:

1. Be a member of the home-school team in the best sense of the term; help carry out the tasks that need to be accomplished. In effect, do your share!
2. Be a good listener and let people know you appreciate and value their ideas by incorporating them in the overall program plan.
3. Be effective in communicating your own ideas so people can readily see what you mean and thus put the ideas to work.

4. Be willing to see the other person's point of view and let that person know you are able to understand it.
5. Be the kind of person who handles his or her part of the tasks effectively and in a manner consistent with the interests of the total team. (7, 40)

The home-school team, when it works to make family life and school life more meaningful, benefits everyone in the community. Children learn more by the models adults set forth than by what they hear adults say. When children see parents and teachers working together as a team they have a positive model to view and utilize in life, and they perform more effectively in school when parents and teachers work together.

Parents, too, benefit from being involved as members of the school team. They have an opportunity to see what happens in school, how their child relates to others and functions in the classroom, and how the teacher organizes learning experiences for the children. Usually when parents are involved in school planning, they acquire a deeper understanding of the complexity of the educational process and are more supportive of the professionals involved in implementing the programs. When parents are involved with the school staff in parent education programs, child care programs, and other activities, they are sure to be more sensitive to the needs of their children in the home environment and within the school setting. (15)

Teachers and other school staff who are working with parents from the beginning of the life of the child are going to be more informed and better able to plan a useful instructional program. They will also have more opportunities to communicate with parents and children, observe the development of children, and begin to organize instructional plans that can help children continue their growth and learning as they enter school. (8)

Beyond the home and school exists a community setting in which all children will be required to function during their lives. The process of learning is based on the idea that learners are healthy, well-nourished, secure, and motivated to become involved in learning. Parents and teachers need to encourage all professionals and citizens in efforts to assure that all children have been immunized against killer diseases, are well-nourished, and most importantly, are able to meet adults who behave in a humane manner. Parents, teachers, and other citizens can make a difference by working together for children. (22)

FACILITATING PARENTS: THERE ARE MANY WAYS

All families need support and encouragement from teachers, other human service professionals, and other citizens of the community. Although parents and children at their best can do many things, they are never totally self-sufficient. Families under stress need the most effective support society can give them. They need encouragement, not pity; help, not ridicule; assistance, not verbal analysis. People need each other! Families need child care helpers, teachers, and other family aides. And communities need families that are productive and secure in their human relationships. (19)

Facilitating families must be the primary task of all societal groups. Teachers and school leaders have a special role to play in this facilitation process. Many educators realize the significance of providing families with the necessary assistance for them to function in positive ways. Consider the following as examples of ways schools can help families of all types. In some cases teachers may carry out such tasks within their own domain while in many other cases the activities will be community-based.

> *Parent-School Cooperative Child Care:* Many parents and children could benefit from a parent-teacher operated child care center in the school. As declining student enrollments leave classrooms empty, the chance for quality child care is possible. A cooperative effort where parents and teachers develop and implement the program can become a mutually beneficial venture. Parents, when the need arises, would have a place where they could leave infants and toddlers. Or, in the case of working parents, such a center could become a good environment for full-time care. Schools that undertake such ventures have obvious access to early working relationships with parents and children. (20)

> *Parent-Child Lending Libraries:* There are many parents and children who can benefit from the existence of a lending library. Materials such as children's books, games, learning kits, books for parents, filmstrips (and equipment), and tapes

can be included in such a library. Housed within the school or center, the lending library provides a bridge for strengthening home-school communications and enhancing the parent-child relationship through stimulating meaningful learning activities. Let the parents and childen know about the lending library and conduct orientation sessions on how to use it. If possible conduct parent education programs in the library and open it up on weekends so parents who are unable to use it during the week have access to it at their convenience. Have displays of children's work and other pictorial arrangements and displays—make it a comfortable place to be! (24)

Family Service Centers: Many kinds of families exist today. Their needs are diverse and usually related to how they function. A school-community based family service center can be the vehicle for helping parents and children solve problems and/or develop stronger bonds as a family unit. Helping families acquire needed medical and dental services will enhance the lives of children, parents, and teachers. This type of center could also help people obtain family counseling, social and economic assistance, employment opportunities, educational improvement, and other service functions. When schools value and serve families, they are improving the growth and learning possibilities for everyone in the community. (5)

Home-School Visitation Program: Seeing and relating to people in personal modes is one way of strengthening the relationship between parents and teachers. Teachers can visit parents in homes or work places, and parents can visit teachers and children in school and classroom situations. These visitations may be informal or they may be more formal home-bound parent education programs. Parents may observe and/or participate in classroom learning situations. The fundamental nature of the communications process is such that these personal contacts, when properly managed, will provide yet another way for parents, teachers, and childen to come to know one another better. (16)

Conferences and Communications: "How is Bill doing in his work?" "Is there something I can do at home to help

Susan?" "Tim seems so daydreamy all the time!" "Ann is having a little problem adapting to our new home situation, but I didn't realize it was bothering her that much!" These are the types of remarks that occur when parents and teachers communicate in conferences, open house programs, and other parent-teacher sponsored activities. The give and take as well as the clarification of problems or recognition of parent-child accomplishments is vital to any home-school relationship. Planning and implementing interesting and informative conferences at various times and places is certainly going to tell parents that teachers *care* about them and want them as partners in the teaching-learning process. (10, 29)

Parent Advisory Teams: Parents have many good ideas on how schools can be improved. Reach out and involve parents on advisory teams to help make decisions about the education of their children. Parents can be of invaluable assistance to the school as members of school improvement groups, curriculum committees, community awareness activities, parent-teacher organizations, and many other such projects. When parents are involved as advisors they come to understand the problems schools face and usually increase their support of the schools. When parents and teachers work together on task forces and other school-related committees, they develop a respect for each other's roles as related to the total development of the child. (16)

Communications, Instant Feedback: Some parents are busy with so many tasks they never seem to have the time to communicate with teachers on a regular basis. Through the use of different telecommunications devices, teachers can provide parents with instant feedback on how their children are performing in school. A phone call to parents letting them know of some of the accomplishments of their child can be a positive step toward a deepening involvement of parents at a later time. A pre-recorded taped message which parents can hear by calling the school can be used to keep parents informed about what is happening at school. Radio and television spots provide parents with continuous information on

special events and programs taking place. Continuous communications are essential to developing productive parent involvement in school and home activities. The various telecommunications modes such as radio, television, and telephone provide instant opportunities for teachers to reach out and involve parents in a variety of home-school endeavors. (2)

Parent Education: Opening, Informing, Learning: Every thinking parent is searching for ways to be a better parent. The tasks involved in parenting are very complex and demanding. Schools (and other community agencies) can help the parenting team by providing a variety of parent education experiences in which parents can develop new skills and enrich already acquired skills. Programs that focus on child care skills, home learning activities, family management, and parent-child relationships are invaluable sources of renewal for parents. In addition, programs can focus on providing parents with job skills, personal enrichment, and information on such topics as nutrition and child abuse. By providing parents with information on topics of interest to them school personnel can open up new opportunities for communicating with parents. (6, 11, 28)

Parent-Teacher Meetings: Large group meetings have often developed into sessions where a few people enforce their wishes and words on the listening audience. However, when group meetings are well planned and implemented, parents and teachers find them useful for exchanging ideas and information needed for the development of positive home-school relationships. These meetings can be the medium through which parents learn about the school program and school needs, and acquire an understanding of how they can better assist the school in providing children with a quality setting for learning. Likewise, teachers can acquire a feel for parent concerns and gain insights into the nature of the families they serve. Most importantly, parent-teacher meetings can provide the continuing communications necessary for a meaningful home-school partnership. (29, 40)

A Parent Place: Parents are not only the child's first teacher but they are also the child's most continuous influence and model. They belong in schools as much as their children do. Yet many parents feel uncomfortable in even visiting the school. By providing parents with a place where they can gather together to share ideas and concerns, help with school tasks, and organize their efforts in productive ways to establish a home-school program, school staff can show that parents are both wanted and needed. Every citizen of the community can take pride in such parent centers. (40)

Informal Contacts: Parents and teachers are busy people. In many cases formal parent-teacher arrangements are such that a significant number of parents are unable to attend. Informal contacts such as early morning coffee meetings or lunch-hour discussions can be used to reach busy parents who would otherwise never make contact with the school. These types of parent-teacher contacts can help keep the communications process open and allow parents and teachers to gain a better understanding of each other. A school environment that invites informal parent visits and discussions with school staff can be the stimulus for developing meaningful home-school activities. (40)

Program Displays: "What happens in that school anyway?" A good question! Teachers can reach out and inform parents of what is happening in their classrooms. Displays of children's work, videotaped examples of how the school program is designed, community visitation days, televised programs on events and activities taking place in the schools are just a few ways of sharing with parents and citizens. In addition, schools can utilize the community setting to display all types of student projects such as artwork, musical presentations, career projects, and portrayals of society. By making the school and the community come alive with exhibits of student work samples the school can communicate with parents and citizens in a most natural way about what is happening in the classroom. Such public communications can only enhance the image of the school. (24)

Neighborhood Visits: Unfortunately, many schools have gained a reputation for being unresponsive to the needs of the neighborhood in which their schools exist. As school busing of students to other neighborhoods has increased a situation of schools without a community has arisen. This situation may not have been caused by educators and indeed usually has not been the direct result of school planning. By providing parents and other citizens with opportunities to meet and discuss concerns of a mutual nature, the home and school can improve their mode of operating. When school personnel conduct neighborhood visits, they are, in a very real sense, bringing the school to parents and citizens who live in the neighborhood. These visits can serve purposes such as getting acquainted with a child's teacher, seeing displays of work completed by the children, hearing descriptions of school programs and activities, and discussing problems unique to the neighborhood visited. Neighborhood visitations also involve people who for various reasons are unable or unwilling to come to the school. (40)

When teachers and other school staff facilitate the involvement of parents in the educational process, they are also enhancing the lives of children in many ways. Parents who are knowledgeable about 'parenting skills' and effective in applying them in their relationships with each other and their children are the most valuable resources a society can hope to develop and nurture to maintain a meaningful culture. Schools that help parents function effectively are providing the basis for establishing the positive home-school relationships so vital to the total development of children and adults. (26)

PARENT EDUCATION: PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES

"I don't know what to expect of my child; this is my first one." "Every time I discipline him he throws a tantrum. What am I doing wrong?" "All she'll eat for breakfast is sugar cracks--what can I do?" These are just a few of the questions that parents ask. Most parents want to do an effective job of parenting and are eagerly looking for ideas on

how to be effective. A recent development has been the emergence of parent education programs which are designed to *help* parents in becoming more productive as 'teachers' and 'facilitators' of infants and young children. The variety of programs and their primary sponsors attests to the diversity of family needs and to the varied responses by social service institutions.

Examples of Parent Education Programs

Parent education and family assistance programs are sponsored by many different social agencies. Schools, community agencies, state education departments, family service agencies, universities, and the federal government are among the major sponsoring agencies. The needs of a particular institution for service or research are usually reflected in these programs. For example, many university sponsored programs are designed to perpetuate on-going research on parenting, while public school programs are organized to enhance the relationship between home and school.

School Sponsored Programs

A variety of parent education programs are currently being implemented in public schools. A major thrust of most programs is to improve parenting behaviors of parents and those who plan to become parents. The *Exploring Childhood* program in Owensboro, Kentucky is an example of efforts to involve high school students in experiences that will improve their concept of parenting, and to provide them with skills they can later use as parents. The program combines classroom study with observation and involvement experiences with infants and young children. Thus students have the opportunity to learn about child development as it is related to the practical aspects of being a parent. Similar parenthood-education programs are being implemented in high schools throughout the nation. (27)

Another type of public school-based program is directed toward families of infants and toddlers. *The Parent-Child Early Education* effort in Ferguson, Missouri is an example of this type of program. Program objectives include diagnosing and treating any learning problems before the child reaches kindergarten, helping children master readiness skills

related to school success, and increasing the parent's awareness and effectiveness as the child's first teacher. Home visits, parent programs, and Saturday School are a few of the techniques being used in this program. A number of project reports, materials, and video samples of program activities have been developed and are available for purchase from the Ferguson-Florisant School District in St. Louis, Missouri. (45)

Although many programs sponsored by schools include only a few experiences for parents relating to infants and toddlers, the *Brookline Early Education Project* is designed to treat this age group in an in-depth manner. A major goal of the program is to assist parents in becoming responsive to the developmental needs of infants and toddlers. Program staff offer various services, such as a toy lending library, staff counseling for parents at the center, monthly home visits, workshops on parenting, and center-based programs for children at the appropriate stage of development. The program is multi-cultural and attempts to reach a cross-section of the community. (15)

Other schools are utilizing a broader approach - combining parent education, adult education, and home-school programs. The *Des Moines Family Learning Centers*, for example, provide a central place for children and adults to relate their needs and interests to the entire educational process. Through family learning specialists and educators from local public schools, parents and citizens can utilize resources, counseling, and programs to enhance their skills or improve their understanding of the learning process. Sharing is a major theme and parents help each other as well as capitalize on parenting workshops and available counseling services to improve their relationships with children. Parents and citizens can also take part in the adult education program. The family learning center approach to parent facilitation is another way to build positive home-school-community relationships. (31)

Community Sponsored Programs

The parenting process and the home-school relationship must be the concern of every citizen in the community. Community agencies (whether utilizing local, state, federal, or combined sources of funding) have been a vital force in the development and implementation of parent education and family assistance programs. The *Parent-Child Center* in Leitchfield, Kentucky is one example of a community based program.

Although funded by the Office of Child Development, the Leitchfield program is controlled by a board of directors (52 percent parents and 48 percent professionals and other citizens) and serves families with children from birth to six years of age. The primary purpose of the program is to train poverty level parents to teach their children. A combination of classroom instruction and home visitation is used to accomplish the goal of improved parenting skills. (15)

One of the more valuable observations made by teachers in *Head Start* programs was the importance of parental involvement. Thus in 1972 the Office of Child Development began a pilot project called *Home Start* in which sixteen communities participated. Although federally funded, broad guidelines allowed each community to design and implement programs that would best meet the needs of economically deprived families in their locale. Common elements in most programs included the use of home visits where 'teachers' worked with parents on resources and activities they could use to help their children physically, emotionally, intellectually, and socially. These programs proved to be especially serviceable to families in rural areas where transportation to Head Start centers was virtually unavailable. (15)

Various community agencies attempt to meet specialized needs of families. The *Child Saving Institute* of Omaha, Nebraska has a special program for servicing the unique needs of single mothers and their children. The primary objective of the program is to help single mothers achieve self-sufficiency in their daily lives and become effective parents. The program provides comprehensive services (including housing, counseling, education, and related services) to meet the needs of single mothers, with emphasis on helping them make the transition to a more independent style of living. (21)

Many communities have developed programs to deal with emergency care for parents and children. The *Comprehensive Emergency Services System* of Nashville and Davidson Counties in Tennessee is one example of a community effort to meet emergency family needs. A community coordinating committee conducted a needs assessment study, designed the comprehensive services program, and obtained funding from the Children's Bureau of the Office of Child Development. Program services include the following: (1) Emergency Caretaker Service, (2) Emergency Response Systems, (3) Emergency Homemaker Service, (4) Emergency Foster Homes, (5) Emergency Family Shelter, (6) Older Children's

Shelter, and (7) Outreach and Follow-Through Services. Through a comprehensive services approach, the program sponsors hope to reduce child abuse and neglect and to improve the environment in which families function, as well as to provide temporary settings where children and adults can rationally plan their futures. (4)

University Sponsored Programs

Although a major function of university sponsored parent education efforts is to expand (through research and development) the knowledge upon which programs are based, it is also apparent that they fill a service function for the public. This is especially the case in community colleges. For example, Seattle Community College offers parents a variety of courses related to infant development, family management, and similar topics. A laboratory approach is used in the courses, and content is based upon the expressed concerns of the parents. Other community colleges and technical schools in the State of Washington conduct similar programs. It is estimated that over 10,000 families have benefited from these projects. (6)

The parent education-early intervention programs at the University of Florida have functioned in service and research capacities. These programs, focused on parents and infants, have attempted to enhance the parenting skills of the participants as well as improve the performance of infants. An important part of these programs was the training and involvement of low-income parents as paraprofessionals. Numerous research studies evolved from the projects, and some of the more significant findings included (1) children gained in I.Q. level as a result of being in the programs, (2) there was a relationship between maternal language behavior and child performance, and (3) low-income paraprofessionals could indeed effect change in the development of disadvantaged infants and toddlers. Products and research reports emerging from these programs can be obtained from the Institute for Development of Human Resources at the University of Florida. (15)

Many universities maintain child development study centers and/or family research projects. A common thread that binds these university sponsored programs together is a concern for providing research related to improving family settings as they emerge in varying forms in this

century. University sponsored projects, in the recent past, have begun to become more closely related to public school and community based programs, thus increasing the chances for research results to be tested and utilized where appropriate in school-community settings.

Programs Sponsored by Special Agencies

Parenting does not stop at the prison door, the steps of a state hospital or, for that matter, at the kitchen door of the family home. Fortunately a few individuals have recognized that parents, regardless of personal predicaments, want and need to continue their roles as parents—for their own identity as well as for the benefit of their children. For example, in the State of Washington Reformatory (Lynwood, Washington) a *Preschool in Prison* has been developed to further the understanding of imprisoned fathers, as well as to strengthen the familial ties of all family members who must deal with the fact that a member of the family is in prison.

The program includes the availability of a child-care center while inmates visit with their spouses, parent education classes for inmates, as well as counseling services for inmates and families. Family life continues even when a father or mother is imprisoned—indeed the need for parental coping skills is heightened by the problems imprisoned parents and their spouses and children must deal with each day. (43)

The recognition that one's child is mentally ill is traumatic, and the motivation of parents in such situations is indeed lowered and dampened by a myriad of social and personal conflicts. In an attempt to meet the needs of families who have children with severe mental problems, the staff of Metropolitan State Hospital (Waltham, Massachusetts) designed a parent involvement program. The program is operated by an advisory council composed of parents who have children in the facility. A comprehensive program of activities ranging from the 'telephone committee' (providing new parent members with someone to talk with about their problems) to parent-staff discussion groups for improving communications between parents and staff is used to help the family use their skills to cope with their situation in a positive manner. (1)

A vast majority of infants are cared for in family day-care programs. Yet many of the families who care for other children lack the skills needed

to meet the needs of very young children. A pilot program to meet the parenting needs of those involved in family day-care is operated by the New York State College of Human Ecology at Cornell Univeristy. The program is housed in a storefront center where family day-care workers can visit and gather materials for use in their homes. Informal discussion sessions, workshops, sharing sessions, and professionally trained staff are available at the center. More formal experiences are also available in the form of parent education courses and human development seminars. A unique facet of the program is the use of teen aides who assist family day-care workers in providing children with quality care. (9)

A State Department of Education Program

In Columbia, South Carolina the State Department of Education has developed and implemented a state-wide program to assist parents and teachers in improving their skills for working with young children. The program is designed to reach parents of children from birth to six years of age. Topics included in the parenting sessions are: Helping Your Child Learn To Talk, How Children Learn Through Play, How Children Learn to Behave, How Children Learn Math, and How Children Learn to Read. Entitled "The Puzzle of Parenting: How to Put it Together" this State Department effort has already reached over one hundred schools in the state of South Carolina. A parent education coordinator involved advisors throughout the state in formulating a curriculum for training teachers to train parents in parenting skills. Training sessions were held in different regions of the state and teachers were given materials to use with parents during the sessions. The major thrust of this program has been to *facilitate* the improvement of parent relationships with infants, toddlers, and young children. (15)

Implications For Schools

The current attempt to increase parent education programs and related family assistance activities is a positive thrust in our society. The idea that education begins in kindergarten is as obsolete as the concept that a high school or college diploma signifies the end of learning. Even a surface examination of existing programs reveals a recognition among educators, parents, university personnel, and institutional leaders, and other citizens that something must be done to enhance the environment in which young children live. (26)

Public schools that have developed parent education and/or related family assistance programs report that the results are beneficial for everyone. And, as recent pilot projects have shown, the earlier the home-school relationship begins, the more profound the impact on families and schools. Parents become more effective in their roles and report that they feel better about themselves. Teachers have found that children and parents relate to the school more positively when home and school have a partnership early in the life of the child. (15)

When parents have access to information about how children grow and develop and have adequate resources to meet the needs of young children, they are better able to perform in productive ways. An important outcome of many parent education programs is that parents begin to realize they can learn new skills for parenting as well as for their personal careers. Adult education programs thus become an integral part of involving parents in life-long learning experiences. They become better parents and citizens and their children have positive models to follow. (6, 11)

Involved and educated parents are usually more understanding of the complexity of teaching and take an active interest in assuring that conditions in schools are conducive to a meaningful program of instruction. In some cases, parents have become very vocal in support of teacher demands for smaller class sizes, better materials and resources, and improved conditions for teachers to carry out the teaching-learning process in a productive manner. Classroom teachers and school administrators are certain to feel more accomplishment when parents are positively supporting their efforts. (8)

In general, children who have the benefit of knowledgeable and caring parents perform more effectively than children who lack the nurturance and interaction that result from positive parenting. Teachers report: "You can tell she has wonderful parents because she is so cooperative and interested in what goes on in our kindergarten classroom." Not only do the children benefit but parents usually are overheard to say "I like my children, and I like seeing them grow." Positive parenting takes time, skill, and a feeling that what one is doing is indeed important. (40)

It is easy to say that every school should have programs related to aiding parents of infants and toddlers. Yet to have effective programs, an increase in personnel and materials is needed. This can take the form of hiring parent education specialists, retraining existing staff, utilizing community agency personnel, acquiring volunteers, or using a combination of people and resources. Many existing programs have utilized

federal or state allocated funds to hire needed staff and to acquire space, resources, and materials. It must be stressed that such funding, although desirable, is not a prerequisite to having good programs. Creative use of existing resources and forming cooperative arrangements with other community groups can be effective ways to establish useful parent-child programs. (48)

Successful parent education programs, whatever their orientation, have been based upon a school-community partnership. Schools that utilize community resources have found programs to be more comprehensive and meaningful to parents and children. An additional benefit of a community based approach is that neither the schools nor any one community agency must pay the bill alone. In some instances, school and community groups have developed closer working relationships as a result of parent education efforts. (22, 26)

Parent education is too important to be postponed until parenthood. School districts that incorporate parent education or similar courses of study into the curriculum are promoting positive parenting by integrating it into the daily experiences of children and adolescents. (25)

Educational leaders, aware of the social realities that influence children's performance in school, have advocated that family assistance programs be more directly related to what happens within school settings. Schools that offer family development activities, possibly within parent involvement programs, will have taken the first step toward a meaningful curriculum for children and adults. When parents are employed, and along with their childen have adequate health care and decent housing, their abilities to use the school experience productively will be enhanced. (24, 40)

EDUCATED PARENTS EQUALS PRODUCTIVE CHILDREN

The concept of the parent's behavior as a major influence on the child's total development cannot be overemphasized. That this influence is invariable, reflected in positive growth changes must not, however, be taken for granted. The educated parent, sensitive to her/his potential for enhancing the child's development, is mindful of the changing nature of the child's needs and strives to maintain an environment conducive to

quality living and learning in the home as well as to foster a spirit of resourcefulness for learning outside the home. (11)

The term "educated parents" is not to be misconstrued to mean parents with academic degrees, awards, or grades. Instead, "educated parents" are those who are sensitive to their children as growing, changing beings. Such parents are willing to be actively involved in supporting their children through meaningful growth experiences.

That all parents do care about their children and want them to grow up to be productive and successful members of society may be assumed safely for all but a minute segment of parents. Simply having children, however, does not provide a guarantee that parents will automatically know how to foster and enhance developmental changes that take place in their children.

Effective parenting (parent practice which has potential for productive learning in children) requires a conscious effort to learn about and understand children and their behavior at the various stages of the growth process. In addition, effective parents recognize the need to be attentive to their own feelings and needs. They recognize that parenting is a developmental process, and with continued learning about themselves and their children, confidence in themselves as educated parents can grow. Effective parenting is an active process, requiring attention not only to the child's emerging needs but also changes taking place in oneself as an individual and a parent. (40)

With respect to the type of atmosphere conducive to productive learning in children, educated parents tend to recognize the importance of simple, safe surroundings which allow children to explore, solve problems, ask questions and receive answers, observe, and interact with others. Such an environment allows children to act out, imitate, meet new situations, and retreat to familiar ones - all with the support and encouragement of a caring, supporting adult team. (13)

In addition, the type of atmosphere which tends to promote effective learning is one which provides opportunities for children to observe parents and/or other significant individuals in the process of living together and working through the full range of problems and situations that confront families today. As children experience associations with other individuals who are willing to help them understand the happenings around them, numerous opportunities for productive learning unique to each family situation present themselves.

Educated parents tend to use a combination of behaviors that encourage children to learn to solve problems, to communicate effectively, and to seek adult assistance when needed. Some behaviors used by educated parents are:

1. Listening to their children with their eyes as well as their ears. Eye contact is a way of showing the adult is listening.
2. Offering answers to children's questions that cause children to think creatively and develop alternative solutions.
3. Reflecting an active interest in numerous topics and activities. Parents' enthusiasm about learning and doing serves as a model of continuous learning for their children.
4. Reading avidly. They enjoy and feel comfortable reading. They read regularly to their children and for their own pleasure. Such adult behaviors set an example for children of the use of cognitive skills for daily needs, as well as for their own interests and pleasure.
5. Pointing out aspects of their surroundings that children are apt to overlook. They take time to discuss and describe happenings that children may misunderstand.
6. Offering praise and encouragement for their children's growth efforts. They are sensitive to the needs for honest praise and simple encouragement. Such adult behaviors assist children to develop the ability to accept honest appraisals of their efforts. (40)

Parents of the children who will be the adults of the twenty-first century play one of society's most important roles. It is becoming widely recognized, however, that simply to have children will not be sufficient for the optimum development of capabilities required for living in the future. Increasingly, parents are coming to recognize the importance of their own active involvement with their children and are, in numerous cases, beginning to assume greater responsibility for understanding and assisting their children in appropriate ways throughout the various growth processes.

Such parents may be called "educated" in the sense that they are cognizant of conditions and behaviors that have positive effects on their children's development and are able to maintain a balance between personal development as individuals and continuous growth as parents.

PARENTS AND TEACHERS LEARN TOGETHER

One of the most promising signs that the quality of life in the classroom has prospects for improvement may be seen in the behaviors of parents and teachers who have begun to perceive their important and complementary roles on behalf of children's development. In almost every capacity in which parents and teachers work together, they are finding new ideas for making home and school more positive forces in the lives of young children.

Through frequent contacts of an informal nature, as well as regularly scheduled conferences, parents and teachers learn about each other, how they relate to children, what progress children have attained, and ways each can enhance the lives of children. Through continuous interactions with the teacher, parents gain special insights into another part of their children's lives—their behavior within the school setting. Teachers acquire ideas on how children function at home and how parents feel about the school. Many other shared ventures can emerge from conferences, including the recruitment and use of parent volunteers and the development of programs to meet family needs evidenced during conference sessions. (7)

Home and school visits help parent-teacher learning. Parent visitations and other activities in which parents are actively involved in seeing and participating in school functions are useful in educating parents about what happens at school. These visits also provide an avenue for parental suggestions and support of school activities. Through home visits teachers *learn* more about children than they can learn from classroom behavior only. Home visits by classroom teachers also allow parents and teachers to get an 'out of school' view of each other and help them learn about each other. (16)

Informal contacts, whether at the school door, in the community, or via telephone, provide teachers and parents brief but important opportunities to build the affective relationships so vital to the success of more formal communications experiences. A phone call to compliment a parent about a child's accomplishment enables that parent to learn about the attitudes and style of the teacher. Likewise, the parent who takes time to show appreciation for teacher efforts is helping the teacher realize that many parents do care and do want to assist toward a good learning program. (4)

The use of parents as aides and volunteers, and in related capacities, opens up a variety of learning opportunities for parents and teachers. Beyond providing the teacher with more time to teach, parent and teacher teaming can help develop an instructional program relevant to the home and school needs of children. Classroom volunteers are also very likely to pick up ideas and practices that can be used in the home setting. (24)

A few school districts have expanded and/or altered their programs to include family learning centers, parent education workshops, lending libraries and other family centered activities. These programs have attempted to help the home and school in accomplishing their common objective--a more human environment for young children. Usually, in family or parent centered programs, parents have varying opportunities to learn about child development, parenting skills, family management, personal development, and other items of interest to them. Teachers who participate in these programs report they learn many things about the families of the children they teach. In addition, teachers also report that parent education programs help them refine their concepts of how children grow and learn, as well as help them realize the complexity of family life as it exists today. (15, 40)

The list of ways in which parents and teachers can learn together is almost endless. Participating in social events, attending in-service education programs, working toward the passing of a school bond issue, organizing a family help program, serving together on school advisory committees, and utilizing parent-teacher curriculum development teams are only a few of the ways in which parents and teachers can grow together and thus expand their views of the entire educational process. (40)

Learning together, however, necessitates that parents and teachers act in concert as they formulate various experiences to carry out their goals. A common sense of purpose is basic to any home-school learning endeavor. The idea that parents and teachers are working together to learn about ways to improve the environment in which children develop is the key to a home-school program. Communication is the prime factor in parent-teacher relationships, and only with positive communication can parents and teachers truly learn together.

Thus parents and teachers are in a position to collaborate on plans to nurture the development of young children. The critical factor in this endeavor is the interpersonal relationship that develops from working and learning together. Further, the quality of such a relationship will only

grow to the extent that parents and teachers alike experience feelings of trust, openness and sincere acceptance of each others' perspectives on a better life for CHILDREN AND ADULTS.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Children learn how to do many things before they enter the public school. They learn how to talk, eat, sing, care for themselves, and how to relate to other people. Most important, children learn something about themselves—who they are, what they can do, and ideally, that they are important and thus valued by other people. Parents play the major role in shaping the first curriculum for their children. As our society has moved from a rural to an urban setting, and as technology has developed, the nature of parenting has changed. Thus parents must perform a balancing act in helping shape a curriculum that assures children the needed security for growing and yet meets the economic and social demands of their own roles.

As the complexity of parenting has increased, the need for broader involvement of people in the parenting team effort has been evident. The need for more extensive parent training has also emerged as a key factor in improving family life. Schools and related community agencies are becoming involved in various efforts to facilitate family development as they recognize the significance of positive experiences for the child within the family. School sponsored parent education programs, community initiated programs in shelter care for abused children, university research efforts related to finding effective modes of improving family life, and government sponsored projects to involve junior and senior high school students in family education are just a few examples of the kinds of activities being pursued to improve home and school settings. School districts throughout the nation are exploring new ways to aid parents and thus reach children long before they enter the school setting. (28)

Why all this concern for parenting and family development? Although people—especially educators—have long known the influence of parents on the behavior of the child, it is only since the family structure has begun to change that parenting has become a major concern. In addition, societal changes including the emergence of mass culture through television and the increased availability of more material goods, have changed the way parents and other citizens behave. In a society that depicts instant

success through the media and offers little secure day-to-day leadership, the parent is hard pressed to motivate a child to work toward idealistic goals.

Parents and teachers alike indicate that they want assistance in becoming more effective in relating to their children. Parents are attending programs and workshops to improve their skills as parents. Teachers are being taught about the changing styles and needs of families, and are thus becoming better able to understand and relate to them. Both teachers and parents have reported that through participation in joint learning experiences, they are not only better able to relate effectively to children, but also are more confident in the supportive team relationship. Together, parents and teachers can play an important role in initiating and developing programs that can strengthen home and school. When parents and teachers assist each other in developing quality experiences for children, the chances of a more stable future are greatly increased.

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